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Cicero in the Shadow of the Bastille

1 Introduction

We might imagine that the French *révolutionnaires*, in the crucial years from 1789 to 1794, had other priorities than fighting over which of them was the best *aemulus* of Cicero. But on the contrary, ancient history in general was taken as a model, while national history was often ignored, and the former had such an important place in the political debate of those years as to be considered by modern scholars to have been a crucial focal point for the newborn French Republic.¹ The Roman Republic was particularly appreciated because it arose through the expulsion of kings: the influence of this model was so strong that it conditioned social life at every level, from toponomastic to personal names (the most frequent names given to babies were Brutus and Scaevola).² It is a rich and varied picture that I do not intend to judge from a historical or political point of view.³ Yet I would like to focus on a peculiar detail of this story: the relevance of the character of Cicero, the most renowned Latin author in these years due to scholastic teaching, in which he played a very important role.⁴ Even if characters and histories are often bound up with each other – Sparta and Rome, the Gracchi and Brutus, Socrates and Cato – Marcus Tullius Cicero enjoyed a special place in the political debate of those years on two different and interrelated levels: as an orator and as a politician. It was not coincidental that the references to Cicero in the debates, assemblies, and journalism of those years were far more numerous than those to other classical authors.⁵

1 In general, for the role of classics in the French Revolution see Récatas 1955; Parker 1965; Mossé 1989; Dubuisson 1989, who notes (35) that in speeches and pamphlets there were twice as many references to ancient Rome as to ancient Greece; Grell 1995; Giardina/Vauchez 2000, 127–134; Trebulsi 2009; Arici 2013; Di Bartolomeo 2017, 146–147. My deepest thanks to Rosalie Stoner for kindly editing my English.

2 Trebulsi 2009, 234–235; Giardina/Vauchez 2000, 128–129; Debusson 1989, 34.

3 On these problematic issues, Baker 2001; Di Bartolomeo 2014, 15–37; Benigno/Di Bartolomeo 2015.

4 Parker 1965, 14–16, stresses the fact that the school handbooks selected only speeches by Cicero. In the second half of the 18th century, higher education was focused on law and Latin culture, especially the Roman Republic, while among Greek texts Plutarch's *Lives* was the most famous (Dubuisson 1989; Trebulsi 2009, 217). There was in general in this period an incredible number of works focused on antiquity (Récatas 1955, 496–497).

5 Parker 1965, 18–19, with special reference to the *Verrinae* and to the second *Philippic*.

Cicero's privileged position made perfect sense: his passionate defense of the Roman Republic, to the point of physical sacrifice, his constant fight against political conspiracies, especially Catiline's, and his non-aristocratic origin, all fit perfectly as a historical model for the French Republicans – but also for their enemies.

Indeed, given the permanent state of political confusion and tension, with ceaseless exchanges of accusations and conspiracy complaints, the roles of the Roman consul and of the subversive fallen nobleman were attributed to, or self-attributed by, different characters at different times, most of all Robespierre. This is the picture I would like to sketch, after a brief introduction explaining why Cicero was regarded as a model at the end of the 18th century.

2 How did Cicero arrive in the French Revolution

Why Cicero? This is the first question classicists might ask when looking at how the most charismatic characters of the Revolutionary period fought for the distinction of being the new Cicero. He was certainly no great commander, but on the contrary was often blamed for his irresoluteness and inconsistency in politics, and was known as fearful and sometimes even coward, far removed not only from persons with absolutist ambitions, such as Gaius Marius and Julius Caesar, who were not appreciated by the revolutionaries, but also from the legendary Cato of Utica, still celebrated as an outstanding martyr of the Republic by Montesquieu (*Considérations* XII 140–141).⁶ In order to understand this exceptional fortune of Cicero, it is necessary to go back a few decades in the 18th century and take a look at the French cultural landscape of that time.⁷

The revaluation of Cicero in that period starts in Great Britain with the *History of Marcus Tullius Cicero* by Conyers Middleton (1741),⁸ translated into French by the Abbé Prévost (1743). In his analysis, Middleton combines political and philosophical judgement: he destroys the myth of Cato, describing him as a slave of an extremist faith, Stoicism, and thus incapable of adapting to reality – and Middleton is here repeating accusations that Cicero himself had addressed to Cato in the *Pro Murena* and elsewhere. Catiline for his part is considered a per-

⁶ Cf. Martin 1984; Chomarat 1991; Eden 2015; also Moraes Santos, p. 341–367 in this volume.
⁷ Zieliński 1912, 245–257 (Enlightenment); 257–267 (French Revolution); Grell 1995, 1090–1098.

⁸ Cambiano 2006; Fox 2013; Ingram 2015. On this influential work, see Kenty, p. 199 and 205 in this volume.

sonification of the enemy of the laws, a dangerous subversive.⁹ Cicero, on the other hand, understood as a quintessential representative of Academic philosophy, is praised for his moderation, sense of justice, and practical spirit. This interpretative scheme, which had been adopted in Great Britain in the context of Anglican religion is in France applied to the political aspects and social origins of the protagonists. In 1748, Crébillon stages the drama *Catiline*, which features a feeble senate and a Cato with tyrannical ambitions.¹⁰ Moreover, the numerous translations of Sallust and the essays on his *Conspiracy of Catiline*, especially the *Histoire de la Conjuration de Catilina* by Isaac Bellet in 1752, who contradicts Sallust himself, portrays Cato as representative of an impotent senate, Catiline of the degraded aristocracy, but Cicero of the vital forces of the city.

Cicero thus becomes a symbol of the new social forces trying to save the state, an ideal model for the contemporary *bourgeoisie*. Along these lines Voltaire, with his *Catilina ou Rome sauvée* (1752)¹¹ affirms, not without some controversy, that Cicero had saved the Republic despite the senate's feebleness and that his death had been due to the triumph of prejudices over virtue and merit: a position that will be shared also by André Chénier.

In brief, the XVIII century bequeaths to the revolutionaries a political Cicero with strongly idealized traits, leaving aside his philosophical, poetical, and rhetorical interests. The complexity of his character and of his public and private story is reduced to a few crucial elements: his humble origin, devotion to the Republic, victory over noble subversion, oratorical cleverness. This is the Cicero over whom the protagonists of the history of those years will fight, as if for a trophy.

After presenting some iconographic evidence, I will focus on three episodes of the years 1789–1794: the trial of the king, the trial of a Latin professor, and the end of Robespierre. In each case I will quote a number of original texts to support my arguments. Most of the texts contain echoes of Ciceronian passages, but I will not examine these in depth, lest we lose sight of the focus of my research.¹²

⁹ This idea has lasted until recent times, as various novels and TV series show (see Stutz in this volume, p. 220–221).

¹⁰ On this and other theatrical pieces, see Martin 1984; Manuwald 2018b, 87–93. The same Crébillon in 1754 staged *Le triumvirat ou la mort de Cicéron* (Manuwald 2018b, 108–111; on Voltaire, 198–202).

¹¹ Martin 1984, 236–242; on Voltaire and Cicero, Sharpe 2015.

¹² Some hints on this theme in Ternes 1991.

3 The first steps of the Revolution

In 1789, Isaac René Guy Le Chapelier, a rich lawyer known for his oratorical ability, was elected the first president of the new Jacobin club and, from the 3rd to the 16th of August, president of the National Assembly, which approved the Declaration of Human Rights. To celebrate this historic moment, he commissioned an engraving from Jean-Baptiste Vêrité with a significant epigraph: “the venerable deputy from Rennes gives new life in his speeches to the art and boldness of Cicero and Demosthenes: and to his talent we owe our freedom”.

Slightly earlier in the same year, André Boniface Louis Riquetti, count of Mirabeau, proved himself an exceptional representative of the Third Estate in the National Assembly. He played a crucial role in the fight against the monarchy, but also acted as a brake upon popular insurrections. The count initially achieved enormous popularity, and sometimes referred to the Catilinarian conspiracy and Cicero’s speeches in his own.¹³ He was the agent of some of the Assembly’s main appropriations, including the confiscation of clergymen’s property. After his unexpected death in 1791, an engraving was commissioned from Louis-Joseph Masquelier, which represents Mirabeau arriving at the *Champs Elysées*; over his head flies the Spirit of Freedom with the words: “France Free”.

Mirabeau walks towards Rousseau and hands him the Constitution. Franklin puts a crown on his head in the presence of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Mably, and Fénelon, all 18th-century Frenchmen who played a role in inspiring, or taking part in, the Revolution. On the second floor in this contemporary scene are Cicero and Demosthenes, who look at Mirabeau with interest and admiration. They are the only ancients.

So, Cicero and Demosthenes were the authorities to whom the protagonists of the very first steps of the French Republic referred, with special emphasis on their oratorical abilities. And yet, needless to say, they were not only the greatest orators of ancient times but also two martyrs who died fighting against a tyrant (Philip of Macedonia for Demosthenes, Mark Antony for Cicero). And they fought with words, not with arms.

¹³ Brasart 1991, 15–16; Trebulsi 2009, 219, with reference to the speech of Sept. 26, 1789 to the National Assembly (*AP IX*196); see also Blackman 2014, on the oath of the tennis court. Here and below, the abbreviation *AP* stands for *Archives Parlementaires de la Révolution Française*, a rich collection of original documents, newspapers, and reports related to the period of the French Revolution (1789–1799), whose publication started in 1862, increased progressively, and is now digitalized (free access to these documents is available at www.gallica.bnf.fr and www.frd.a.stanford.edu/fr), and on schedule for completion (cf. <http://www.bibliotheque.sorbonne.fr/biu/spip.php?rubrique211>).

Fig. 1: Jean-Baptiste Vérité, *Le Chapelier*, Engraving, 1789 (source: www.gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque Nationale de France).

Cicero was appreciated also by the political opposition to the Revolution. Shortly after the aforementioned actions of Le Chapelier and Mirabeau, the countess of Montrond, Angélique Marie Darlus du Tailly, published anonymously a royalist essay entitled *Le long Parlement et ses crimes. Rapprochements faciles à faire – A Paris, à l'imprimerie d'un royaliste*, 1790. The author describes the republicans as subversive people whose aim is the destruction of the state. The essay ends with some *Reflections on Catiline and his conspiracy*. Here, the Countess draws a parallel between Catiline's Rome (where Catiline stands for the French republicans), Cromwell's London, and contemporary Paris, and praises

Fig. 2: Louis-Joseph Masquelier, *Mirabeaux arrive aux Champs Élysées*, engraving, 1791 (source: www.gallica.bnf.fr/ Bibliothèque National de France).

Rome for its political organization. Here are some passages from the text (p. 90–93):

Sans Catilina et Pompée, peut-être que Rome auroit eu dans Cèsar qu'un grand Général, et non pas un Dictateur altéré du pouvoir suprême. Catilina sans moeurs, sans probité, sans respect pour les Dieux, dont l'ambition étoit la seule divinité [...] se servant du prétexte de l'intérêt du peuple pour perdre Rome et subjuguier l'Italie [...]. Rome échappa, à plusieurs reprises, à la tyrannie des ambitieux; mais le Sénateurs pouvoient parler; mais le Sénat étoit honorable et respecté, et si les ambitieux se formoient dans son sein, ils y étoient en petit nombre. Tout étoit auguste dans cette Assemblée. Le peuple, successivement séduit par les plus sanguinaires des humains, Cinna, Maris, Scilla [sic], Catilina lui-même, qui tous se couvroient du voile de son intérêt pour l'asservir après l'avoir enviré d'hommages; le peuple n'exprimoit ni applaudissement ni blâme. L'orateur étoit écouté de quelque parti qu'il fût, et Cicéron dénonça en plein Sénat Catilina présent.¹⁴

14 “Without Catiline and Pompey, it is likely that Rome would have had with Caesar nothing other than a great general, and not a dictator with absolute power. Catiline, who had no values,

There is also a note to this text that states: “Cicero, displeased by the feebleness of the senate towards Catiline, said: ‘This feebleness arises from the fact that a part of the senate has too much fear, another part has nothing to fear’”.¹⁵

4 The Trial of King Louis XVI

As is well known, the king of France, Louis XVI, after an initial phase in which it seemed possible to calm the political disorder through the institution of a constitutional monarchy, was progressively stripped of power by the revolutionaries, and finally deposed on August 10, 1792. He then tried to escape, while exhorting other European monarchies to fight against the French republicans. He was caught in Varenne, tried, and condemned to death with his wife, Marie Antoinette.

The trial, held from December 5, 1792 to January 17, 1793, had much in common with the expulsion of the kings by the Romans in 509 BCE¹⁶ – the king was indeed caught betraying his fatherland – but also with the senate’s proceedings against Catiline’s followers in 63 BCE: A peculiar correspondence between the two situations concerned the possibility for the accused to appeal to the people; this would have been very dangerous for the provisional government, given the strong influence that the monarchy exercised over the poor. Some Montagnards,¹⁷ including Robespierre and Saint-Just, would even have preferred a con-

no honesty, no respect for God, for whom ambition was the only God [...] used the excuse of the “interest of the people” to ruin Rome and lead Italy to ruin [...]. Rome escaped, more than once, from the tyranny of ambitious men; but the Senators could talk; the Senate was honorable and respected; and if ambitious men grew up inside it, yet they were few. Everything was venerable in that assembly. The people, later seduced by the bloodiest of men, Cinna, Marius, Sulla, Catiline himself, all of whom covered themselves with the veil of its interest in order to make it slave after making it drunk with tributes – the people did not express praise or blame. The orator was listened to, whatever his party, and Cicero made his charge against Catiline in his presence”. Here and below, the translations are mine, again with the great help of Rosalie Stoner.

15 “Cicéron, mécontent de la foiblesse du Sénat pour Catilina, disoit: ‘Tant de foiblesse vient de ce, qu’une partie du Sénat craint trop, et que l’autre n’a rien à craindre’”.

16 After the king’s flight towards Varenne, Cambon said: “il ne nous manque pour être Romain que la haine et l’expulsion du roi. Nous avons désormais la première, nous attendons de vous la seconde” (“to become ancient Romans, we only need to hate and expel the king. We have already obtained the former: we are awaiting from you the latter”). Cf. Dubuisson 1989, 33.

17 They were the politically more extreme and included Robespierre’s fellows, who were later called Jacobins. The Girondins were more moderate, federalist republicans. In 1793 they were broken up and annihilated by the proscriptions.

demnation without a trial, and it is precisely in this regard that they evoked Roman precedents.

Here is a fragment of the speech by Louis Antoine de Saint-Just, given on November 13, 1792:¹⁸

On s'étonnera un jour qu'au dix-huitième siècle on ait été moins avancé que du temps de César: là le tyran fut immolé en plein Sénat, sans autres formalités que vingt-trois coups de poignard et sans autre loi que la liberté de Rome. Et aujourd'hui l'on fait avec respect le procès d'un homme assassin d'un peuple, pris en flagrant délit, la main dans le sang, la main dans le crime! [...]

Louis était un autre Catilina; le meurtrier, comme le consul de Rome, jugerait qu'il a sauvé la patrie. Louis a combattu le peuple: il est vaincu. C'est un barbare, c'est un étranger prisonnier de guerre. Vous avez vu ses desseins perfides; vous avez vu son armée; le traître n'était pas le roi des Français, mais le roi de quelques conjurés.¹⁹

It is interesting here that Saint-Just, while completely justifying Cicero's behavior towards the Catilinarians and identifying Louis with Catiline, cites the death of Caesar and not of the Catilinarians. This is because he knew well that the death of the Catilinarians caused the banishment of Cicero a few years later for having condemned Roman citizens without due process: a story that had much in common with that of the trial of the king.

More specifically against the appeal to the people are the words of Robespierre (December 28, 1792):²⁰

La minorité a partout un droit éternel, c'est celui de faire entendre la voix de la vérité ou de ce qu'elle regarde comme telle.

La vertu fut toujours en minorité sur la terre. Sans cela, la terre serait-elle peuplée de tyrans et d'esclaves? [...] les Critias, les Anitus, les César, les Clodius, étoient de la majorité; mais Socrate étoit de la minorité, car il avala la ciguë; Caton étoit de la minorité, car il déchira

¹⁸ AP LIII 390 – 392. Cf. Dubuisson 1989, 29 and 33; Di Bartolomeo 2014, 165.

¹⁹ “People will wonder one day that in the 18th century we were less advanced than in the times when Caesar the tyrant was killed in the middle of the Senate, without any other formalities than twenty-three stabs, and without any other law than Rome's liberty. And nowadays we celebrate with respect the trial against a man who killed his people, caught in the act, with blood on his hands, his hands in the crime! [...] Louis is another Catiline: his murderer, just like the consul of Rome, should think he has saved his fatherland. Louis fought against his people: he was defeated. He is a barbarian, a stranger, a prisoner of war. You have seen his evil projects; you have seen his army; this traitor is not the king of the French anymore, but the king of some conspirators”.

²⁰ *Moniteur* VII 365, Convention Nationale, Séance du vendredi 28 décembre 1792, 1558 = Robespierre, *Œuvres*, vol. IX (Bouloiseau et al. 1958), 198 – 199; cf. Di Bartolomeo 2014, 170. *Le Gazette Nationale ou le Moniteur Universel* is a newspaper published from 1789 to 1810, whose scanned copies are available at www.gallica.bnf.fr.

ses entrailles. Je connais ici beaucoup d'hommes qui serviront, s'il le faut, la liberté [...] forts des armes de la justice et de la raison, tôt ou tard vous les verrez triompher.²¹

It is quite striking to read these words from a man who supported republican rules and the rights of the people. In this case, Robespierre was well aware that the king still possessed considerable authority in the eyes of the people, and so he chose to base his argumentation on those who were falsely accused by a majority (including people who were opposed to Cicero, like Caesar and Clodius) and had to face death, like Socrates or Cato. Historical examples like these will return, as we shall see, in Robespierre's last speech.

Let us quote another participant in the debate, the Montagnard Jean-Bon Saint-André:²²

Il ne faut accuser personne; mais l'appel au peuple dans cette crise où l'opinion est comme déchirée, peut détruire la République, qui ne démêle point parmi les images terribles et l'amertume qu'on nous oppose des ressentiments sous des traits étrangers: Catilina aussi parlait de la souveraineté du peuple romain. C'était en son nom qu'il conjurait contre la liberté. Quel monstre sur la terre n'a point déguisé sa noirceur sous le masque de la vertu? Catilina prenait à témoin les dieux, Catilina demandait l'appui des lois; vous qui parlez d'appel au peuple, que nous dites-vous autre chose? Quels sont ceux qui nous ont proposé la force armée? Quels sont ici les hommes les plus passionnés? Quels sont ceux qui font de ce temple de la liberté un autre tartare qui semble habité par les furies? Quels sont ceux qui n'ont encore ici proposé que des lois de sang avant des lois humaines? Ce sont les mêmes qui proposent l'appel au peuple.²³

21 "The minority has everywhere an eternal right, that of spreading the voice of the truth, or of what it considers to be such. Virtue has always belonged to the minority on earth. If not, would the earth be populated by tyrants and slaves? [...] The Critiases, the Anytoses, the Caesars, the Clodii were the majority; but Socrates belonged to the minority, because he drank the hemlock; Cato belonged to the minority, because he eviscerated himself. I know here some people who will serve freedom, if it is necessary [...] with justice and reason as their weapons, sooner or later you will see their triumph".

22 Jean-Bon Saint-André, discours à la Séance du mardi 1 janvier 1793 (AP LVI 119).

23 "I do not want to accuse anyone; but the appeal to the people in this crisis, in which public opinion is torn apart, can destroy the Republic, which cannot sort out the fearful images and the bitterness which gives us resentments under foreign appearances: Catiline also spoke of the sovereignty of the Roman people. It was in its name that he conspired against freedom. What monster on earth has not disguised his darkness under the mask of virtue? Catiline took the gods as witnesses, Catiline asked for the application of the laws: you who talk about appealing to the people, are you telling us anything different? Who are those who proposed military force? Who are here the most passionate men? Who are those who make this temple of liberty another Tartarus inhabited by the Furies? Who are those who have only proposed here the laws of blood before human laws? Those are the same who propose the appeal to the people".

5 Being a Latin professor in Paris in 1793: the trial of Antoine Le Tellier

A first, albeit unfruitful, review of some arbitrary arrests was followed by a few students protesting at the National Convention. They brought attention to the case of Professor Antoine Le Tellier, who had been imprisoned on May 14, 1793 because of some of his history lessons.²⁴ The Law Committee was entrusted with verifying the facts, and on May 26, the deputy Gilles Porcher-Lissonnary read the committee report, which was favorable to the release of the professor. Of the five persons arrested on that occasion, Le Tellier was the only one still in prison, because the Paris municipality refused to drop the charges. The professor, who taught at the Collège Quatre-Nations, faced multiple charges of subversive political propaganda: the main evidence against him was “Un des morceaux les plus vigoureux de la première *Catilinaire* de Cicéron, donné à traduire à ses écoliers”.²⁵ Among the dangerous homework assignments distributed to his students were many Latin passages from Cicero and Sallust. Le Tellier was said to have exhorted his pupils to pay attention to the analogies between Robespierre’s Paris and Catiline’s Rome, both in the hands of an ignorant mass. Porcher argued convincingly that he had in fact done so, and added that the conspirators reminded him of Clodius, Cicero’s archenemy. But, despite fierce opposition from Marat, Porcher persuaded the Convention to release the professor. Porcher did not deny that the accused held such views, but he ridiculed the fact that the charges were rooted in texts that were almost two thousand years old.

Here are some passages from Gilles Porcher’s report:²⁶

“Là, c’est un des morceaux les plus vigoureux de la première *Catilinaire* de Cicéron, donné à traduire à ses écoliers, et un des plus propres à faire trembler les conspirateurs et les factieux” [...] (Murmures prolongés sur la Montagne.)

[...] Salle: “Allons, un décret d’accusation contre Salluste”.

Un autre membre (à droite): “Non, je demande qu’il soit traduit avec Cicéron à l’Abbaye”. (Violentes interruptions des tribunes.)

Porcher-Lissonnary, rapporteur, poursuit: “Je passe en revue les différents devoirs donnés à ses jeunes élèves, qu’on a joints ici comme une preuve du danger qu’il y avait à confier à ce citoyen une éducation républicaine. Mes yeux parcourent partout, avec plaisir, les plus beaux endroits de Cicéron, de Salluste et de Raynal.

²⁴ AP LXV, séance du 22 mai 1793, 181. Cf. Di Bartolomeo 2014, 185–188.

²⁵ “One of the most vigorous sections of Cicero’s first *Catilinarian*, given to his pupils to translate”.

²⁶ AP LXV, séance du 26 mai, 347–348 and 350.

J'y vois Rome élevée au plus haut degré de grandeur et de force, sur le point d'être rien: versée par un petit nombre de scélérats qui avaient juré sa perte. 'Ils paralysaient les décrets du Sénat, ils séduisaient la multitude ignorante; ils corrompaient l'esprit public; ils rendaient si puissante la contagion qu'ils glissaient dans l'âme de tous les citoyens, que personne, dit Salluste, ne sortit du camp de Catilina pour découvrir la conjuration qui menaçait la liberté'.

On lit, dans un autre devoir, un tableau bien frappant de la cause des maux qui auraient perdu Rome à cette époque, sans le génie de Cicéron.

'On vit arriver dans Rome', dit encore Salluste, 'comme dans un égout, des hommes fameux par leur brigandage, qui avaient consommé leur patrimoine dans la débauche et dans l'infamie, tous ceux que leurs crimes avaient chassés de leur patrie; ils entraînaient le peuple loin des vrais principes; ils applaudissaient au dessein de Catilina, ce qui était naturel; car, le plus souvent, ceux qui sont dépourvus de richesses portent envie aux bons, élèvent les méchants, se nourrissent de troubles et de séditions, haïssent les lois, en désirent de nouvelles' [...]

Citoyens, on vit toutes ces horreurs dans Rome; mais lorsque les projets liberticides de Catilina furent déjoués, on ne vit point les complices de sa conjuration lever insolemment la tête, et accuser de trahison les meilleurs citoyens'.²⁷

27 "Here is one of the most vigorous passages of Cicero's first *Catilinarian*, given to his students to translate, one of the most appropriate for making conspirators and sectarians tremble" [...] (prolonged murmur from the Mountain) [...] Salle steps in: "Let us draw up a charge against Sallust!". Another member from the right: "No, I demand that he be taken with Cicero to the Abbey!" (violent interruption from the stands). Porcher-Lissonnary, the speaker, continues: 'I sort through the different homework assigned to his young students, which have been here reported as evidence of the danger in confiding in this citizen a republican education. My eyes wander with pleasure among the most beautiful passages of Cicero, Sallust, and Raynal. [An Enlightenment author.] I see Rome, raised to the highest level of greatness and power, on the point of being reduced to nothing, overturned by a small number of villains who had sworn its ruin. 'They have paralyzed the Senate's decrees, seduced the ignorant people, corrupted the public spirit, made the infection so powerful that it spread in the soul of every citizen, to the point that no one', says Sallust, 'went out of Catiline's camp to reveal the conspiracy which put liberty at risk'. In other homework you can read an impressive list of the causes of the evils which would have ruined Rome in those years, if not for Cicero and his genius. 'You can see arriving in Rome', says Sallust again, 'as in a sewer, persons who are famous for their banditry, who had consumed all their property in infamous vices, all those whom their crimes had banned from their fatherland: they alienated people from authentic principles, they approved Catiline's projects, as was natural: because those who have lost their property feel envy against the good, choose the evil, feed off seditions and revolution, destroy the laws and desire new ones' [...] Citizens, you see all of these horrors in Rome: but when the freedom-killing projects of Catiline were revealed, one could not see the accomplices of his conspiracy raising insolently their heads and accusing the best citizens of treason".

The newspaper *Le Patriote Français*, managed by Brissot, a deputy of the Gironde, agreed with Porcher and added some sarcastic details to the story:²⁸

“Le grand crime de Letellier, professeur au collège des Quâtre-Nations, dont la Convention a ordonné l’élargissement, était d’avoir fait des vers latins contre Robespierre et Marat, et d’avoir fait traduire dans sa classe les Catilinaires de Cicéron et la conjuration de Catilina par Salluste. Aussi Salle a-t-il demandé ironiquement le décret d’accusation contre Salluste et un mandat d’arrêt contre Cicéron. Des membres du coin, qui croyaient que Cicéron et Salluste étaient quelques-uns des hommes de l’État qui s’assemblent chez Valazé, ont crié: ‘Aux voix!’ Bourdon, Bentabole réclamaient la lecture des vers latins de Letellier, mais on leur a objecté qu’il faudrait les leur traduire, et c’était un embarras”.

And so Professor Le Tellier was released, despite his supposedly dangerous Ciceronian and Sallustian readings. Those readings were indeed evidence of a political position that was firmly against the ideas of Robespierre and his supporters, as subsequent events soon showed. A short time after these occurrences the insurrection of June 2 took place; on June 3 the professor was imprisoned again, then released, imprisoned another time (May 16, 1794), and finally condemned to death on June 24, for a reason that this time was exclusively political and not cultural: his support for the conspirators Brissot, Gorzas, and others.²⁹

28 *Le Patriote Français* 1383, du 28 mai 1793, 591: “The huge fault of Le Tellier, professor at Quatre-Nations college, for whom the Convention ordered the extension [sc. of the imprisonment], was to have written some Latin poems against Robespierre and Marat, and to have translated in his class Cicero’s *Catilinarians* and Sallust’s *The Conspiracy of Catiline*. Salle requested sarcastically a formal accusation against Sallust, and an arrest warrant for Cicero. Some local members, who believed that Cicero and Sallust were contemporary politicians who met at Valazé’s, cried: ‘To the polls!’ Bourdon, Bentaboll, and others demanded the reading of Le Tellier’s poems, but they were told that these would have had to be translated for them, and there was a certain embarrassment.”

29 “Le Teiller has been condemned because he was acknowledged guilty of being one of the fiercest federalists, and of having exchanged mail with them; of being a friend of Buzot; of having provoked more than once the citizens who compose the general assembly of the section of the Unity; of having tried to justify Brissot, Gorsas, and other conspirators” (Rabourdin 1998, 185).

6 Robespierre

Robespierre is one of the most charismatic protagonists of the Revolution, and so he naturally deserves an important place in this story.³⁰ His relationship with Cicero began through another professor, Monsieur Hérivaux, who played a crucial role in Robespierre's conversion to the republican cause. Hérivaux taught rhetoric at the Louis-Le-Grand college, and had a genuine passion for Greek eloquence and most of all for the rhetoric of the Roman Republic. These are Robespierre's memories of Hérivaux, collected by a famous biographer:³¹

Monsieur Hérivaux [...] avait une âme qui sympathisait singulièrement avec la mienne; à force d'expliquer à ses élèves les beaux faits de la République romaine, les moeurs austères de Sparte et le prodiges d'art et d'éloquence que la liberté avait enfantés au milieu des légiers et spirituels habitants de l'Attique, il avait fini par vivre dans ce cercle d'idées; et devenu républicain enthousiaste, il nous prêchait les bienfaits et les merveilles du gouvernement qu'il s'était fait. Les chefs du collège souffraient ses véhéments panégyriques; ils en plaisantaient même, comme d'un travers sans conséquence; mais nous qui devons plus qu'eux saisir le côté plaisant de la chose, nous avions eu le travers de la prendre au sérieux. Jusqu'alors j'avais montré peu de facilité à m'émouvoir; les éloquentes harangues de Cicéron étaient pour moi sans charmes; mais dépouillées de l'intérêt qui s'attache à la réalité, privées de la vie que leur donne l'appréciation des temps, elles n'excitaient en moi qu'une sterile admiration. Les paroles de M. Hérivaux m'ouvrirent les yeux: il évoquait les vieilles ombres des Gracques, reconstruisait la tribune au milieu du Forum, ou la chaise curule des sénateurs, et remplissait le Sénat, la place publique, de vieillards vénérables blanchis au service de leur patrie, ou d'une multitude immense, d'un peuple entier délibérant sur le choix des ses déléguées, accusant, jugeant et punissant [...]. Je voyais le mont Aventin, et j'enviais le sort de ces tribuns courageux, chargés de mettre un frein aux empiétements du patriciat et de sauvegarder les droits du peuple [...]. Je dois à ces premières instructions, que l'étude a depuis rectifiées, les semences de mes invariables opinions. M. Hérivaux s'aperçut des vives impressions que son enthousiasme avait laissées dans mon esprit; il s'en applaudit, et me donna, en plaisantant, le surnom de 'Romain' qu'il avait déjà reçu lui-même.³²

30 On Robespierre's understanding of the Roman Republic, see Baker 2001, 47–52; on his personal use of classical rhetoric, Heuzé 1991; on Ciceronian reminiscences in his speeches and political theory, Ternes 1991, esp. 318–321.

31 Graterolle 1894, 16–17.

32 “Monsieur Hérivaux [...] had a soul which was particularly in tune with mine: by dint of explaining to his pupils the fine deeds of the Roman Republic, the sober customs of Sparta, and the prodigies of art and eloquence which freedom had created within the light and spiritual inhabitants of Attica, he ended up living within that circle of ideas; thus, having become an eager republican, he preached to us the merits and marvels of a government which he himself had created. The deans of the college were annoyed by his fierce panegyrics; also, they made fun of them, like a digression without any consequence: but we, who should have laughed at that

So, enlightened by his inspiring Latin professor, Robespierre became a renowned lawyer and presented himself as a new Cicero,³³ a heroic defender of the Republic. But he soon found, albeit more due to his previous political extremism than to his role in the proscriptions, that he was accused of being the opposite of a Cicero, *i.e.* a new Catiline or even a new Caesar. In the following pages, I will quote only some of the many passages on this subject.³⁴ Jean-Baptiste Louvet, a Jacobin who later allied with the Girondins, at the National Convention of October 29, 1792 accused Robespierre of tyrannical aspirations and called for a new Brutus against him:³⁵

Ainsi tu marchois à grand pas, Robespierre, vers ce pouvoir dictatorial dont la soif te dévorait, mais où t'attendoient enfin plusieurs hommes de quelque résolution, et que, n'en doute pas, ils avoient juré par Brutus, tu n'aurois pas gardé plus d'un jour.³⁶

The same Louvet published a pamphlet on the subject, where he draws significant parallels:³⁷

Citoyens, s'il existoit dans la république un homme né avec le génie de César, ou l'audace de Cromwell, un homme qui, avec le talent de Sylla, en auroit les dangereux moyens, je

story more than they – we ventured to take it seriously. Up until then I had never been easily moved; the eloquent harangues of Cicero seemed to me empty of charms; deprived of the interest that is connected to reality, without the life given them by the appreciation of the times, they excited in me only a sterile appreciation. The words of M. Hérivaux opened my eyes: he evoked the shadow of the Gracchi, he rebuilt the tribune in the center of the Forum, or the curule chair of the Senators, and filled the Senate, the public place, with venerable white-haired old men in the service of their fatherland, or with an immense crowd, a whole people deliberating on the choice of their delegates, accusing, judging, and punishing [...]. I saw the Aventine, and I envied the fate of those brave tribunes who were entrusted with the task of limiting the encroachments of the patricians and protecting the people's rights [...]. I owe to this primary instruction, which later my personal study completed, the origin of my personal convictions. M. Hérivaux realized the vivid impression that his enthusiasm had left on my spirit; he was pleased by this, and he gave me, for fun, the nickname 'Roman', which had previously been given to himself". On the nickname "Roman", see Récatas 1955, 211.

³³ Trebulsi 2009, 255.

³⁴ We can add *e.g.* the reference made by Brissot to Marat, whom he compared to Clodius (Brissot 1793, 34 n. 1); in two letters addressed to the Committee on Public Safety (June 16, 1793) and to the citizens of Gannat (June 17), he justifies his flight from Paris due to his fear of Marat, stating that even Cicero was not ashamed of fleeing from Clodius (Perroud 1911, 356 and 358).

³⁵ Louvet 1792a, 13.

³⁶ "You moved quickly, Robespierre, towards that dictatorial power for which you felt a devouring thirst, but where many people with strong resolution were waiting for you: I have no doubt that, if they had sworn for Brutus, you would not have had more than one day left".

³⁷ Louvet 1792b, 6–7.

viendrais avec courage l'accuser devant vous; un tel homme pourroit être dangereux à la liberté. S'il existoit ici quelque législateur d'un grand génie, d'un caractère profond, ou d'une ambition vaste; je demanderois d'abord s'il a une armée à ses ordres, ou un trésor public à sa disposition, ou un grand parti dans le sénat ou dans la république [...]. Mais des hommes d'un jour, de petits entrepreneurs de révolution, des politiques qui n'entreront jamais dans le domaine de l'histoire, ne sont pas faits pour occuper le temps précieux que vous devez aux grands travaux dont le peuple vous a chargés.³⁸

The long argument goes on to accuse Robespierre of having created an actual triumvirate.³⁹

Robespierre's reply to Louvet in front of the National Convention contains a clear self-identification with Cicero:⁴⁰

On lui reproche des arrestations qu'on appelle arbitraires, quoiqu'aucune n'ait été faite sans un interrogatoire. Quand le consul de Rome eut étouffé la conspiration de Catilina, Clodius l'accusa d'avoir violé les lois. Quand le consul rendit compte au peuple de son administration, il jura qu'il avait sauvé la patrie, et le peuple applaudit. J'ai vu à cette barre, tels citoyens qui ne sont pas des Clodius, mais qui, quelques temps avant la révolution du 10 août,⁴¹ avoient eu la prudence de se réfugier à Rouen, dénoncer emphatiquement la conduite du conseil de la commune de Paris. Des arrestations illégales? Est-ce donc le code criminel à la main, qu'il faut apprécier les précautions salutaires qu'exige le salut public, dans les temps de crise amenés par l'impuissance même des lois?⁴²

38 "Citizens, if there has ever existed in the Republic a man who was born with the genius of Caesar, or with the audacity of Cromwell; a man who, with Sulla's talent, would have had his same means, then I would bravely come to accuse him before you; a similar man could be dangerous for freedom. If there existed here a legislator of great genius, of profound character or with limitless ambitions, I would immediately ask you if he has an army at his orders, or an immense treasure at his disposal, or a great party of supporters in the Senate or in the Republic [...] but some men for a day, some little businessmen of the revolution, some politicians who never come into the ranks of history, are not made to occupy the precious time that you owe to the great duty with which the people have entrusted you".

39 Louvet 1792b, 51. The fellow partners in the triumvirate would have been Marat and an unidentified person. Later on, in 1794, the same accusation was made in reference to Robespierre, Saint-Just, and Couthon (Baczko 1989, 20).

40 Robespierre, *Oeuvres*, vol. IX (Bouloiseau *et al.* 1958), 87–88.

41 This is the date of the storming of the Tuileries Palace, which led to the abolition of the monarchy.

42 "He is accused of arbitrary arrests, although none of them were made without an interrogation. When the consul of Rome stifled the conspiracy of Catiline, Clodius accused him of having violated the laws. When the consul rendered an account of his administration to the people, he swore that he had saved his fatherland, and the people applauded. I have seen at this bar some citizens who are not like Clodius, but who, some time before the Revolution of August 10, had had the foresight to run away to Rouen, to denounce emphatically the behavior of the council of the Commune of Paris. Illegal arrests? It is then with the criminal code in hand that it is neces-

The legitimacy of breaking laws in order to save the Republic remains a crucial point in the discussion.

Later on, in 1793, the attacks against the so-called “enemies of the Revolution” begin. Among these were the principal members of the Gironde, including Élie Guadet, an eminent lawyer who was renowned for his oratorical passion. He was one of the targets of Robespierre’s accusations. Here is the opening of one of his replies, pronounced on April 12, 1793:⁴³

Citoyens, si en dénonçant au Sénat de Rome celui qui avoit conspiré contre la liberté de son pays, si en accusant Catilina, Cicéron eût fondé son accusation sur des preuves de la nature de celles que Robespierre a produites contre moi, Cicéron auroit excité contre lui-même l’indignation de tout le Sénat: et si après avoir annoncé “qu’il venoit remplir un ministre douloureux et pénible”, si après avoir déclaré que l’amour de la patrie et la connaissance d’une grande conjuration avoient seules pu le forcer à rompre le silence, Cicéron eût terminé son accusation par une plâte et froide plaisanterie; si mêlant aux grands intérêts de la liberté des ridicules jeux de mots, il eût conclu en faveur de l’accusé, après l’avoir peint comme un vil scélérat, Cicéron eût été honteusement chassé du Sénat: car à Rome on détestoit la calomnie et on savoit punir les calomnieurs. Mais Cicéron étoit un homme de bien, il n’accusoit pas sans preuves [...]. Cicéron aimoit son pays: il n’eût pas pris le mouvement de l’orgueil et de la haine pour les élans du patriotisme. Cicéron enfin... je m’arrête. Aussi bien que peut-il y avoir de commun entre Cicéron et Robespierre, entre Catilina et moi?⁴⁴

In this speech, not only the subject, but also the style – anaphoric, emphatic, pathetic, with a final aposiopesis – is exquisitely Ciceronian, especially typical

sary to evaluate the salvific precautions that public safety requires, in times of crisis brought about by the powerlessness of the laws?”.

43 Guadet 1793, 1; cf. Di Bartolomeo 2014, 188 and 192.

44 “Citizens, if in denouncing to the Senate of Rome the one who conspired against the freedom of his own country, if, in accusing Catiline, Cicero had grounded his charge in proofs of the same nature as those which Robespierre has produced against me, then Cicero would have aroused against himself the indignation of all the Senate: and if, after having announced “that he was launching a painful and excruciating charge”, if after having declared that his love for his country and the discovery of a great conspiracy had forced him to break his silence, Cicero had ended his accusation with a plain and cold pun; if, mixing absurd wordplays with the great interests of freedom, he had ended in favor of the charged man after having described him as a vile villain, then Cicero would have been expelled by the Senate in shame; because in Rome they hated calumny, and they knew how to punish slanderers. But Cicero was a good man, and he did not accuse without evidence [...] Cicero loved his country: he would have never mistaken feelings of pride and hate for patriotism. Cicero, in the end... but I stop here. So, what can there be in common between Cicero and Robespierre, between Catiline and me?”.

of Cicero's speeches to the people. The end of Guadet's speech also contains very Ciceronian overtones:⁴⁵

Citoyens [...] songez qu'ils vous demanderont compte, un jour, de l'usage que vous aurez fait de ce pouvoir. Songez que l'anarchie est le garant du succès de toutes les conspirations, que l'ordre et l'amour des loix en sont le tombeau; songez enfin, songez que c'est dans l'anarchie qu'est l'espoir de nos ennemis. C'est elle, et non Pharsale, qui livra Rome à César; c'est elle, et non les victoires de Cobourg qui vous livreront à l'Europe coalisée.⁴⁶

In addition to denying the identification of Robespierre with Cicero in this passage, Guadet is perhaps recalling another speech, that of Caesar in Sallust's *De coniuratione Catilinae*. Here, speaking of the possible condemnation of the Catilinarians, Caesar warns the senate, and most of all the consul Cicero, that the future will inquire about the decision they are making. And we know that Cicero was later sent into exile for this. So, in a way, Guadet is recognizing Robespierre as a new Cicero, but in a peculiar respect: that of someone who misuses his power, doing something illegal for which he will later have to answer.

On June 2, 1794 many Girondins were arrested, and Guadet was among them. After having escaped and tried variously to resist and to raise an insurrection, he was caught and guillotined with his father, his aunt, and his brother on June 17.⁴⁷

The Revolution considered itself a new order, to be preserved against attempts to subvert it, but this effort was soon to fail. The bloody repression of revolts raised ever stronger waves of resentment against Robespierre and his friends, as his enemies sought his downfall.

Robespierre's final speech, delivered in the meeting of 8 Thermidor,⁴⁸ contains a self-defense against the charges of tyranny that is clearly influenced by Cicero: "qui suis-je, moi qu'on accuse? Un esclave de la liberté, un martyr vivant

⁴⁵ Guadet 1793, 47–48.

⁴⁶ "Citizens [...] you have to remember that they will demand an account from you, one day, about the use you made of this power; you have to know that anarchy is the guarantee of success for all conspiracies, while order and respect for the laws declare their death; you have to know, finally, that in anarchy lies the hope of our enemies. This, and not Pharsalus, is what delivered Rome to Caesar; this, and not the victories at Coburg, will deliver you to Europe united against you".

⁴⁷ Around the same time, the municipality of Marseille turned against the Jacobins, evoking the burning zeal of Cicero against the fury of Catiline (*Moniteur* VIII 147, 25 mai 1793); cf. Di Bartolomeo 2014, 196–197.

⁴⁸ The philological reconstruction is that by Hamel 1897, based on the manuscripts preserved by the heirs of Simone Duplay, who was Robespierre's secretary. The quoted passages come from pages 248, 251, and 253. The same text appears in Robespierre, *Oeuvres*, vol. X (Bouloiseau/Soboul 1967), 556, 565, and 567.

de la République, la victime autant que l'ennemi du crime".⁴⁹ Regarding his former comrades who betrayed him, especially Barère, he says: "aujourd'hui ils me caressent de nouveau: leur langage est plus affectueux que jamais. Il y a trois jours ils étaient prêts à me dénoncer comme un Catilina: aujourd'hui ils me prêtent les vertus du Caton".⁵⁰ Again:

En voyant la multitude de vices que le torrent de la Révolution a roulés pêle-mêle avec les vertus civiques, j'ai craint, quelquefois, je l'avoue, d'être souillé aux yeux de la postérité par le voisinage impur des hommes pervers qui s'introduisaient parmi les sincères amis de l'humanité, et je m'applaudis de voir la fureur des Verrès et des Catilina de mon pays tracer une ligne profonde de démarcation entre eux et tous les gens de bien. Je conçois qu'il est facile à la ligue des tyrans du monde d'accabler un seul homme, mais je sais aussi quels sont les devoirs d'un homme que sait mourir en défendant la cause du genre humain.⁵¹

A source favorable to Robespierre, Ernest Hamel, proposed a new reconstruction of the meeting of 8 Thermidor, and praised Robespierre's choice to avoid a popular insurrection in his own defense, writing:

Custodiatur igitur mae vita reipublicae. Protégé donc ma vie pour la République aurait-il pu dir avec Cicéron; et cette exclamation eût suffi, je n'en doute pas, pour remuer tout le peuple de Paris. Il ne voulut pas la pousser. Mais que, cédant à un sentiment de mélancholie bien naturel, il se soit écrié: 'S'il faut succomber, eh bien! Mes amis, vous me verrez boire la ciguë avec calme', cela est certain.⁵²

So, in the end Robespierre compared himself not only to Cicero, but also to the most famous political martyr of all, Socrates, who, although innocent, was condemned to death by his fellow citizens.

49 "Who am I, I who am accused of tyranny? A slave of liberty, a living martyr of the Republic, a victim no less than an enemy of the crime".

50 "Today they are caressing me anew; their words are sweeter than ever. Three days ago they were ready to report me as a new Catiline: today they bestow on me the virtues of Cato".

51 "Looking at the number of vices which the stream of Revolution has dragged confusingly together with the civic virtues, I was afraid sometimes, I confess, to be defiled in the eyes of posterity by the impure nearness of those perverse men who presented themselves as authentic friends of humanity, and I am happy to see that the frenzy of the Verreses and Catilines of my country trace a deep dividing line between them and all the good men. I know that it is easy for the coalition of tyrants to ruin a single man, but I also know what the duties are of a man who knows how to die defending the cause of the human race".

52 "'Protect my life for the Republic' he could have said, with Cicero [*Phil.* 12.30]: and this sentence would have been enough, I have no doubt, to raise all people in Paris. He did not want to say it. But that, giving in to a naturally melancholic mood, he would have said 'If I have to die, my friends, you will look at me drinking hemlock peacefully' is certain." (Hamel 1897, 270).

In this same regard we refer to another source, but hostile to Robespierre, who, not coincidentally, chose the following Sallustian snippet as an epigraph for his pamphlet: *at qui sunt qui rem publicam occupavere? Homines sceleratissimi, immani avaritia; nocentissimi, iidemque superbissimi* “who are those who seized the Republic? Most wicked men, of infinite avidity, most dangerous and also most insolent” (Sall. *Iug.* 31.12).⁵³ This author envisions the following exchange as part of the last parliamentary fight between Jean-Lambert Tallien and the Incorruptible:

Je le demande: est-il un représentant du peuple qui voulût exister sous un tyran? Robespierre, comme frappé de la foudre, reste immobile; lui, devant qui ses collègues tremblaient il y a deux jours, tremble à son tour [...] demande qu’il lui soit permis de parler. Tallien lui lance un regard furieux, lui fait un geste menaçant, lui ferme la bouche, et dit: ‘Par ce que je viens de voir, les conjures seront anéantis, et la liberté triomphera.’ En disant ces mots, Tallien tire un poignard, le fait briller aux yeux des spectateurs, et continue: ‘C’étoit dans la maison de Robespierre où l’on conspiroit, où l’on dressoit des listes de proscription. [...] si l’étoit possible que le décret d’accusation ne fut pas porté contre Robespierre, je me tuerois à l’instant avec ce poignard. [...] Catilina est dans l’assemblée.’⁵⁴

And so, in the end Robespierre, who had presented himself continuously as a new Cicero, found himself defined, as in the words of Tallien on 9 Thermidor and in those of the whole assembly on the 10th,⁵⁵ “a modern Catiline”. This is confirmed by a contemporary anonymous engraving of his decapitated head gushing blood, with the text “Robespierre, surnommé le Catilina moderne, exécuté le 10 Thermidore du 3^e [sc. année] de la République”. The engraving also includes a phrase attributed to him: “J’ai joué les Français et la divinité... Je meurs sur l’échafaud, je l’ai bien mérité”.

53 Des Essartes 1797. The quoted passages come from pages 140 – 141. Right before Robespierre’s surrender in July 1794, a translation of *The Conspiracy of Catiline* by Charles de Brosses was published, where again Robespierre appears as a new Catiline. The same thing happened in 1795, with a translation published by Louis Joseph Billecocq.

54 ‘I am asking you: is there a representative of the people who would like to live under a tyrant?’. Robespierre, as if hit by a bolt, remains motionless; he, in front of whom his colleagues trembled just a few days before, is himself trembling [...] he requests permission to speak. Tallien casts him a furious look, he makes a menacing gesture, he prevents him from talking, and says: ‘From what I have just seen, the conspirators will be destroyed, and freedom will triumph’. Saying these words, he takes out a dagger [it was Brutus’ dagger, as his supporters say; his mistress’, as some malicious enemy suggests], he makes it shine in front of the spectators’ eyes and says: ‘It is in Robespierre’s house that they conspire, that they make the proscription lists [...] if it will not be possible to charge Robespierre directly, I will turn this dagger against myself [...] Catiline is in this assembly’.

55 Robespierre, *Oeuvres*, vol. X (Bouloiseau/Soboul 1967), 591. Cf. Baczko 1989, 13.

Fig. 3: Author Unknown, *Maximilien Robespierre, surnommé Le Catilina Moderne*, engraving, 1794 (source: www.gallica.bnf.fr/ Bibliothèque National de France).

Yet Robespierre's death appears more like that of Cicero, betrayed by his former ally Octavian and beheaded by Marc Antony's hit men, than like that of Catiline, who died with his supporters while fighting against the regular army of the Romans.⁵⁶

In 1795, Félix Louis de Montjoie published the *Histoire de la conjuration de Robespierre*, a pamphlet which is – from the title on – a violent attack against the Incorruptible, and an identification between him and Catiline. The text opens with a mention of Catiline's conspiracy (Sall. *Cat.* 14.2) and a sharp judge-

⁵⁶ Cf. Fig. 17 and 18 in Martín Puente, p. 165–166 in this volume.

ment (p. 3–4): “Robespierre, pendant qu’il vivoit, étoit surnommé le Catilina moderne; depuis le supplice qui a terminé ses jours, il a été comparé par les uns à Catilina, par les autres à Cromwel. On l’a mal jugé avant et après sa mort. Ce monstre fuit plus stupide que Claude, et mille fois plus féroce que Néron”.⁵⁷

The hatred against Robespierre lasted for years. In 1800, François-Xavier Pagès de Vixouse published the *Nouveaux dialogues des morts* between the protagonists of the French Revolution and many famous men. His model is clearly Lucian. In this book, Robespierre appears twice; he is indeed portrayed in conversation with both Catiline and with Sulla. The dialogue with Catiline opens as follows (p. 17):

Salut, Catilina; vous voyez en moi ce Robespierre qui a cherché, mais par des moyens différens des vôtres, à asservir à sa domination un empire presqu’aussi puissant que celui don’t vous voulûtes vous rendre le maître. Des hommes tels que nous auraient-ils jamais dû succomber, l’un sous le faible et timide Cicéron, et sous un sénat divisé et corrompu; l’autre sous une assemblée non moins divisée. Et sous les rivaux les plus vils à mes yeux?⁵⁸

Again, we have an identification, or at least a comparison, of Robespierre with Catiline, while the criticisms of Cicero are presented as false, because they are pronounced by the villain Robespierre.

7 Conclusion

Beyond a political evaluation, which is not the purpose of this limited study, a general conclusion is that the protagonists of the Revolution shared a deep classical culture in which they believed and sought their roots. In a way, this was not so different from how European humanists many centuries earlier had engaged in a similar endeavor. Despite all the historical, political, and social changes that

57 “While he was alive, had been nicknamed ‘a modern Catiline’; since the execution that ended his days, he has been compared by some to Catiline, by others to Cromwell. He has been judged bad before and after death. This monster has been duller than Claudius, and a thousand times crueler than Nero”. Another pamphlet, published by Edme-Bonaventure Courtois in 1795, was, significantly, titled *Ma Catilinaire*.

58 “Hello to you, Catiline; you see in me that Robespierre who tried, but in different ways from yours, to enslave to his power an empire almost as powerful as that of which you would have liked to become the master. Persons like us should have not succumbed, the one to the feeble and trembling Cicero, and to a divided and corrupted senate; the other to a not less divided assembly, and to viler rivals, in my opinion”.

divided those two eras, the attitude towards the classics did not substantially change. The Revolutionaries did not want to present themselves as something completely new, but rather as the prolongation of a noble classical tradition whose spirit Cicero perfectly embodied.

It is beyond any doubt that the Revolutionaries appreciated in Cicero that which he himself cared for the most, *i.e.* his zeal for liberty, his oratorical ability, and his love for the Roman republic. And they chose him as a defender of the Republic over Cato, who was perceived as too radical and idealistic, a political failure, and over Brutus, who was perfect as a character but without any works or speeches that could have fostered an identification with him. Instead, they chose Cicero the consul, the winner over the attempted subversion of Catiline. They ignored the irresolute Cicero of the civil war, the Cicero who flattered Caesar while he was in triumph, and focused on the heroic Cicero, the opponent of, and subsequently martyred by, the usurper Marc Antony.

From Cicero's complex political life, the Revolutionaries selected the moment that saw him legally invested with the highest political responsibility of all, during which he fought with all means, even to the point of illicitly issuing death penalties, in order to preserve the order such as it was. They chose the consulship as the quintessential Ciceronian moment, which Cicero himself celebrated in his poetry and which was the sole image he would have liked to leave to his successors. It is not a coincidence that some ancients, including Seneca, said that it would have been better for Cicero to have died right after the conspiracy of Catiline (*Marc.* 20.5).